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SUBJECT: DUP PARTY SPLINTERS DUE TO POOR LEADERSHIP AND NCP
POACHING

REF: KHARTOUM 128

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Recent defectors to the NCP describe the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) as lacking effective, democratic leadership and a vision for the future. They see the NCP as an attractive alternative and contend that the NCP has changed for the better since Al-Turabi's departure. They are less attracted by the SPLM, viewing it as an armed rebel movement rather than a political party. Some observers accuse the NCP of poaching across party lines in order to weaken the DUP and guarantee an NCP victory in the 2009 elections. End Summary.

Democratic Unionist Party Splinters Again

¶2. (U) Several prominent members of the DUP recently announced their defection to the National Congress Party (NCP) shortly after the start of a DUP-NCP dialogue. Meanwhile preparations are under way for the expected return of elderly DUP leader Mohamed Othman Al-Mirghani after almost 18 years of self-imposed exile in Egypt. Like most other Sudanese political parties in recent years, the DUP has suffered several internal splits, but the most recent resulted in the loss of prominent DUP members who have provided financial support over the years.

¶3. (U) Five factions now carry the name Democratic Unionist Party moniker: the original DUP led by El-Sayed Mohamad Othman Al-Mirghani, DUP Hindi Faction, DUP Haj Mudawi Faction, DUP Mohamed Al-Azhari Faction, and the DUP Mirghani Abdel-Rahman Faction. Each group claims to legitimately carry the DUP name.

DUP "Without Political Leadership"

¶4. (SBU) Poloff met separately with two of the most recent prominent defectors, wealthy businessmen Ali Abbarsi and Hisham Al-Brair. Abbarsi and Al-Brair share common reasons for leaving the DUP for the NCP. They complained about Al-Mirghani's long absences from Sudan as well as his autocratic management style, pointing to failures to consult others in the party leadership, control of party members' activities, lack of transparent and democratic decision making, failure to nurture a successor generation in the party, and treating party members as Al-Khatmia Sufi sect followers. (Note: Although technically separate organizations -- one religious, the other political -- most members of the Al-Khatmia Sufi religious sect also belong to the DUP. End Note).

¶5. (SBU) Ali Abbarsi charged that Al-Mirghani "is managing the party by phone from outside the country." He claimed the A-Mirghani is not available most of the time and spends three months in Sudan and the rest of the year in London or Alexandria. Al-Brair asked rhetorically "how can we serve the country's causes without political leadership?" According to Hisham Al-Brair, disagreements within DUP have been on the rise in the last eighteen months.

NCP Has Changed, SPLM Has Not

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¶16. (SBU) Asked about why they joined the NCP rather than form a new DUP faction as have other DUP defectors, Abbarsi and Al-Brair asserted that NCP has changed dramatically after the departure of Hassan Al-Turabi in 2000. "My disagreements with the NCP ended when Al-Turabi left, which was a shift from the iron fist policy and since then the NCP has headed in a different direction," said Al-Brair. "The policy the NCP is following now represents 60% of the original DUP policy" he added. Abbarsi echoed the comment about Turabi's departure and pointed to his need to protect his interests as a businessman. "I cannot afford to stay away from the economic decision-making circles and allow others to control my business decisions."

¶17. (SBU) Abbarsi and Al-Brair said they did not consider joining SPLM when they decided to leave the DUP for two main reasons. First, according to Al-Brair "We do not trust them especially after the late John Garang decided to negotiate the peace agreement with the NCP without discussing the idea or even informing the DUP leadership, his partners in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)." Second, according to Al-Brair and Abbarsi, although the SPLM now is the NCP's partner in the Government of National Unity, "they need to transform themselves into a political party before the elections." (Note: The SPLM obviously is a political movement, though it is notable that these DUP defectors share a perception of the SPLM as an armed rebel movement, a view shared by many northerners. End note.)

¶18. (SBU) Regarding elections, Al-Brair opined "they must be held in the whole country - no exceptions for Darfur or the South." Al-Brair noted that the NCP is ready to form alliances with other parties including the Umma party, the DUP, and the Communist party. However Al-Brair indicated that he is against an alliance with the Communist Party "because it has been closed on itself for many years and has nothing new to offer."

DUP: We're Reaching Out Too

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¶19. (SBU) In an earlier meeting with Poloff, DUP-Al-Mirghani Deputy Secretary General Tag Elsir Mohamed Saleh said that his party

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"continues conversations with all stakeholders in Sudan." Saleh said the DUP's dialogue with the NCP is limited to election arrangements and national reconciliation. He noted that the DUP is represented on the Elections Laws Committee. "We support the mixed-electoral system based on a 50-50 percentage" as advocated by the SPLM "and could even accept 55-45, but not the 60-40 proposed by the NCP, because this is going to maintain the status quo."

Comment

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¶10. (SBU) While Al-Mirghani clings to the DUP leadership and frustrates members with his management style, the NCP is all too eager to poach prominent defectors like Abbarsi and Al-Brair, possibly obviating the need for an alliance with DUP Al-Mirghani. The NCP would also like to break up the moribund (pre-CPA) National Democratic Alliance - which was chaired by Al-Mirghani and included the DUP, the Umma, and the SPLM - in favor of an all northern alliance confronting the SPLM and cornering it as only a "Southern" party with limited appeal. Both of these actions strengthen the hand of the NCP heading into elections, should they ever actually occur.

FERNANDEZ